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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000684

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS, S/CT
PACOM FOR FPA (HUSO)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: TWO YEARS ON, STILL NO ATTACKS
OUTSIDE THE SOUTH

REF: A. BANGKOK 258 (CT ASSISTANCE)

- [1](#)B. 05 BANGKOK 7750 (BANGKOK MUSLIMS)
- [1](#)C. 05 BANGKOK 7573 (BRN-C)
- [1](#)D. 05 BANGKOK 3854 (OIC LOOKS AT SOUTH)
- [1](#)E. 05 BANGKOK 3633 (SATUN PROVINCE)
- [1](#)F. 05 BANGKOK 3203 (RUMORS OF U.S. CONSPIRACY)
- [1](#)G. 05 BANGKOK 2603 (SEPARATIST PROPAGANDA)

Classified By: DCM Alexander A. Arvizu. Reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION: Since the coordinated raid on a Thai Army weapons depot in Narathiwat on January 4, 2004, there have been almost daily attacks and several dramatic violent incidents attributed to militant Muslim separatists in far southern Thailand. Over this two year period there has been serious concern that the violence might spread further north, yet this scenario has not developed. This cable (the first of two) argues that historic factors, including the militants' cell structure; local suspicion of outsiders; the "Malayu" language; and Malay ethnicity have contained the violence to the far South. This remains a localized conflict based on local factors. Septel will discuss how a "separate" reality is already being successfully created on the ground in the South. END SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

STRUCTURE LIMITS REACH OF THE MILITANTS CELLS

[1](#)2. (C) Thus far, Thailand's renewed 100 year-old separatists insurgency has been largely contained to the far South. The solidifying consensus is that there is a core group of militant cells that are tapping into a wider and looser network of youth to carry out attacks across far southern Thailand (reftel C). The way that these cells have evolved, while effective, has limited their ability to spread. The militant cells are without an identifiable hierarchical structure and appear to be based on personal relationships established through Islamic pondok schools. This loose, personal structure has frustrated Thai authorities and proven to be an effective way to carry out attacks and avoid disruption from security forces. However, the disparate nature of the militant cells also means that their actions tend to be focused locally among familiar surroundings and people. It is a challenge for the militants' cells to operate easily outside of their immediate surroundings.

SUSPICION OF OUTSIDERS HELPS CONTAIN NETWORKS

[1](#)3. (C) The high level of fear and mistrust evident throughout the South has also limited the ability of militants to operate outside of their immediate surroundings. People in the region are highly suspicious of outsiders and rumors are rife that "dark forces" -- or the U.S. -- are behind the violence (reftel F). Attacks almost always occur without anyone taking responsibility, and the RTG has also consistently failed to successfully investigate or prosecute cases related to the southern violence (reftel A). These factors reinforce local suspicion of those outside their immediate village. In this atmosphere, it is difficult for outsiders -- be they Muslims from another village, Thai intelligence operatives, or foreign terrorists -- to quietly slip into village life without attracting attention. Muslim villagers in the Muslim majority province of Satun, for example, are highly suspicious that Muslims from neighboring Yala, Pattani, or Narathiwat may be connected to unwanted militant violence (reftel E).

LANGUAGE ACTS AS A BARRIER -- AND A BRAKE

[1](#)4. (C) Language is another important factor in understanding the historic limit of the militants' cells reach. The "Yawi" or "Malayu" Malay dialect is the primary language for many southern Muslims, especially in rural villages. This creates a linguistic barrier that allows Malayu speaking militants to operate easily in many villages and limits the ability of Thai security forces to penetrate the militant networks. While Malayu gives the militants a degree of freedom of operation in the provinces that have

large populations of Malayu speakers (Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani), the language also acts as a brake, limiting the ability of militants to set up cells outside of the Malayu speaking communities. A Malayu speaking militant might be able to hide easily among the Malayu speaking Malay-Thais in the three southernmost provinces, but he sticks out like a sore thumb anywhere else in Thailand: including in neighboring Songkhla and Satun provinces, where Thai is the predominant language.

ETHNICITY SEPARATES MUSLIMS IN THAILAND

15. (C) Ethnicity is also a factor in explaining why the violence has not expanded to other Muslim communities in Thailand. Southern Malay Muslims are, by definition, different from the ethnic Thai and Sino-Thai who make up the bulk of Thailand's population, including those Muslim-Thais found in other parts of the country. An ethnically Malay-Thai outside of the far South attracts attention and suspicion. Additionally, Bangkok Muslims do not feel a close kinship to their ethnically Malay co-religionists from the South and do not have a deep appreciation for the grievances of southern Muslims against the government (reftel B).

STILL LOCAL AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, BUT...

16. (C) The violence in the South primarily stems from local historic grievances and aspirations (reftel G) and remains primarily a local ethno-nationalist conflict. The violence is being committed by locals on local targets, but this does not guarantee that other parts of Thailand will be spared from this festering conflict. The violence continues to attract some degree of attention from the larger Islamic world (reftel D), and transnational elements may be tempted to insert themselves in this textbook case of "Muslims being violently repressed." Still, for reasons described above, our assessment remains that the southern violence is unlikely to spread outside the South or take on an international character, at least not in the near term. That being said, the character of the South has changed dramatically: Militants do not need to conduct attacks outside of the far South because a "separate" reality is already being successfully created on the ground, as we will discuss in septel.
BOYCE